

Girls' Education: Good for Boys, Good for Development

Worldwide, approximately 1 billion adults are considered illiterate. Throughout most of the world, boys traditionally have outnumbered girls in primary and secondary schools—often by considerable margins—so it is not surprising that two-thirds of the world's illiterate adults are women. Illiteracy imposes enormous costs that help trap developing countries in a vicious cycle of poverty. Population growth, for example, is closely associated with educational attainment. Each year, 1 in every 16 women without secondary education gives birth; for women with secondary education, the rate is only 1 in 100. The lesson is clear: With more education, women have fewer children.

Donor agencies are now designing educational programs specifically to encourage families to enroll their daughters in primary schools. But these efforts often raise questions about the value of targeting scarce educational resources to promote girls' education and concerns that education investments are a "zero sum" proposition in which funds devoted to girls' education necessarily subtract from educational opportunities available to boys.

Experience shows otherwise. When the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee opened schools for girls, many parents preferred them to the government's boys' schools and sent their sons as well as their daughters to them. In Guinea, after girl-focused educational reforms, boys did better on standard exams. In Guatemala, boys' attendance was higher at schools that participated in a girls' scholarship program than at nonparticipating schools.

When education programs target girls, both girls and boys are winners. In fact, girls' education programs aim to educate all children. The focus on girls ensures that their needs—frequently ignored—are understood and included. This emphasis is necessary because efforts to increase the supply of schools, teachers, and materials without addressing girls' needs do not necessarily bring girls to school or keep them in school through completion.

Why Girls' Education?

The number of children in schools in the developing world has increased markedly over the last two decades, but because of inadequate infrastructure, shortsighted national education policies, and small education budgets, more than 400 million children are still not in school. Despite an increase in the proportion of girls enrolled, there are 75 million fewer girls than boys in school. In most developing countries, enrollment rates remain higher for boys than girls. Why is there still a gap between girls' and boys' attendance?

Economic, social, and cultural issues make girls' school attendance a complex decision for parents. Parents fail to enroll girls for many reasons. They may not send girls to school because they consider the benefits of education for girls to be limited and the cost of fees, uniforms, and supplies to be too great a drain on the family budget. They may keep girls at home to help with domestic work. If a school is far away, parents may fear for their daughters' safety. Even when parents do send a daughter to school, she may have difficulty succeeding in a system where the majority of teachers are male, male students are favored, and classroom dynamics require a spirit of competition with which she often has little experience.

Educating girls requires addressing the complex mix of obstacles keeping girls out of school. Designers of girls'

education programs strive to reduce barriers for girls while ensuring that initiatives do not negatively affect boys.

What's Good for Girls Is Good for Boys

Enrollment Increases. Work to increase girls' school enrollment has universally benefited boys. In Guinea, the government targeted girls in an educational reform. Girls' enrollment increased, but boys' enrollment rates increased even more. Why do girls' education programs bring more boys to school? Boys who live in rural areas or are ethnic minorities face some of the same educational barriers as girls, including lack of parental support, difficulty in getting to distant schools, and mediocre facilities. When educational systems solve problems that prevent girls from learning, they simultaneously lower educational barriers for many boys.

When a girls' education initiative seeks to provide special advantages to girls, parents and teachers often intervene to ensure that boys share these benefits. In Malawi, school fees were waived for girls as part of a comprehensive educational reform. Male students in one village staged a strike, and parents refused to pay their sons' fees. The Malawi government thereafter abolished fees for all students. A girls' initiative raised awareness about an educational issue and all students benefited. As in Guinea, boys' enrollment in Malawi ultimately increased even more than girls' enrollment did.

But more than enrollment improves. One girl-focused project in Guatemala resulted in lower dropout rates and higher promotion rates for both boys and girls. Apparently, making parents aware of girls' education made them focus their attention on boys' education as well. They increased their support as much for their sons'

schooling as for their daughters'. The benefits of a girls' initiative were naturally and equitably broadened to boys.

Better Teachers, Better Schools. Girls and boys in the same classroom do not receive the same education. In developing countries, in particular, boys are taught to be assertive. They demand and receive more attention from teachers. Girls, in contrast, are socialized to behave more passively and are easily ignored by teachers. When teachers use methods that encourage standing and shouting, boys learn better. Because boys appear to be more responsive, teachers perceive them as more interested and smarter. They give boys more attention and positive reinforcement. In addition, educational materials typically show many strong role models for boys but few or weak role models for girls. This differential valuing of girls' and boys' performance creates a cycle that partially explains differences between girls' and boys' school success. For girls to succeed in school, they need methods that encourage active learning and reward them for their effort.

Guatemala's Nueva Escuela Unitaria program of one-room, multi-grade community schools provides empirical evidence of instructional approaches that are positive for both girls and boys. USAID/Guatemala's Better Education Strengthening Project supported a demonstration project of 200 Nueva Escuela Unitaria schools that used collaborative learning, peer teaching, and self-instructional guides—all methodologies that successfully address differences in girls' and boys' learning styles.

These active-learning methods prompt children to work alone or in small groups of peers. Working with children their own age, girls do not feel intimidated and become active learners. Gender-neutral materials, girl-positive teacher behavior, and bilingual education were also incorporated in Nueva

Escuela Unitaria schools. Project results suggest that overall classroom quality—the combination of teaching quality, methodology, and materials—is most important for improving achievement, enrollment, and retention for both boys and girls.

In learning how to instruct girls, teachers become better educators. When they adopt active-learning methods, they begin to expand their teaching styles and methods to meet the needs of all students. They come to realize that children learn in many different ways. They increase their awareness of gender differences and let go of stereotypical responses to students. They become aware of their own strengths, weaknesses, and habits as teachers. As a result, they become more effective in working with all children.

Increased Resources at National and Local Levels. There is no evidence that boys have ever lost out as a result of a girls' education program. On the contrary, when resources are invested in girls' education, resources increase for boys, too. In Guatemala, Morocco, and Guinea, USAID's Girls' Education Activity has emphasized mobilizing national and community leaders to spearhead girls' education campaigns. In Guatemala, three private sector foundations have supported large girls' education projects. In Morocco, a bank is focusing on ways to improve girls' education. National leaders, not only from the private sector but also from government, the media, and the religious community, have initiated projects using their own resources and have advocated for increases in the national primary education budget that benefit all children. The involvement of national leaders has provided a model for local action.

Girls' education initiatives often rely on community participation to

mobilize demand for girls' education and to help open and manage schools. To form school committees or parent-teacher associations in communities where parents have little formal education, capacity building on educational issues and management is essential. School committees may need training in basic

organizational concepts such as the roles of officers, conduct of effective meetings, conflict resolution, and bookkeeping. When committee members learn these skills, community management of schools can improve school quality and efficiency, teaching accountability, student participation, and the communities themselves.

Community leaders can organize infrastructure projects such as building roads to make schools more accessible, installing water systems to reduce girls' water-carrying duties, and constructing latrines to make schools more sanitary and provide privacy for girls. These types of projects not only support education for both

Benefits of Selected USAID Projects with Girls' Education Components*

Guatemala: Basic Education Strengthening Project (1989-1997)

Components Targeted to Girls

- National leaders mobilized.
- Teachers, community members, and education officials received gender training.
- Gender-sensitive instructional materials and curriculum guides developed.
- Self-instructional guides developed to help girls catch up after missing school.
- Gender-sensitive curriculum planning instituted.
- Flexible school calendar, compatible with girls' domestic responsibilities, adopted.
- 200 one-room, one-teacher, community schools established.
- Three incentive packages tested: scholarships, community outreach, and motivational classroom materials.

Benefits to Boys

- Classrooms without bias encouraged participation of all students, not just the assertive ones. More heterogeneous participation created more dynamic classrooms.
- Gender-sensitive materials and training benefited all students by showing realistic role models.
- Boys in Nueva Escuela Unitaria schools had better attendance than boys in control group schools.
- Scholarships, paid as monthly stipends to parents, could be used for any family expense and thus benefited boys as much as their sisters.

Short-Term Development Benefits

- Private sector provided funding for education.
- Through gender training, community members learned about changing roles and expectations for men and women.
- Government implemented a five-year scholarship program for girls, benefiting girls and schools.

Guinea: Ministry of Pre-University Education: Educational Reform (1990-2000)

Components Targeted to Girls

- National Equity Committee, an intra-ministerial working group, advocated

increasing knowledge and awareness of girls' education.

- National social marketing campaign conducted.
- Pilot campaign raised community awareness.
- Latrines constructed.
- Female teachers recruited.
- Standard of one book to one student ratio established.
- Tracking of student achievement initiated.
- Liberalized pregnancy policy established.

Benefits to Boys

- Parents gave increased priority to education for all children.
- Boy's enrollment increased from 40 to 66 percent.
- Boys performed better on both 2nd and 7th grade standardized exams than they did prior to girl-focused educational changes.
- Latrines provided for boys.
- Boys exposed to female teachers as contemporary female role models.
- More boys given their own books, rather than having to share with another student.

Short-Term Development Benefits

- Community exposed to new ideas about women's roles and the need for girls' education.
- School latrines demonstrated practice of good hygiene.
- Teachers provided exposure to modern female role models.
- Pregnant girls allowed to continue in school.

Mali: "Village Schools" of the Basic Education Expansion Program (1989-1998)

Components Targeted to Girls

- School calendar and schedule adapted to conform to local agricultural seasons.
- Curriculum designed to be relevant to rural life and customs.
- Local language used for instruction.
- Schools required 50/50 attendance of girls and boys.
- Management committees established to oversee school construction and management and teacher payment.

Benefits to Boys

- Boys in village schools performed better on language tests than boys in government schools.

- Boys in village schools had lower dropout rates than boys in government schools.

Short-Term Development Benefits

- Community members gained experience in civic roles as members of the school committee.

Bangladesh: Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee Non-formal Primary Education Program (1982-1992)

Components Targeted to Girls

- Community-based, multi-grade schools run by nongovernmental organizations established.
- Schools located in communities through use of rented rooms equipped with trunks to hold materials.
- Female teachers recruited and trained.
- Parent committees established and trained.

Benefits to Boys

- Parents preferred the program's girls' schools to the government schools because they were closer, were free, and used physical punishment infrequently. Substantial numbers of boys were enrolled.

Short-Term Development Benefits

- Community members participated in school decisions. Parents believe they will be able to form future committees.
- Standards of cleanliness and hygiene provided a model for the community.

Long-Term Development Benefits Of All Projects

- Educated girls will have lower birthrates.
- Girls and their families will be healthier.
- Girls will have more employment opportunities.
- For each year of education, girls will have increased earning power.
- Women's earnings will be used for health and education expenses.
- Girls will participate more broadly in civic affairs.
- Educated girls will become better educators of the next generation.

*Some projects are multi-donor activities.

girls and boys, but they also benefit the community as a whole. School access roads make walking easier for all, water systems reduce everyone's water-carrying burden, and school latrines serve as a model of improved hygiene practice for the whole community.

Communities that promote and manage education profit from the involvement. As shown in the chart on page 3, the most typical benefit is civic experience. School management committees give local citizens the opportunity to take part in democracy in action. By working on a school committee, members gain experience in organization and advocacy they can then use to address other development issues.

A Development Imperative

Educating girls realizes many development benefits. Educated

women choose to have fewer children. They keep themselves and their children healthier. Educated women are more likely to send their children to school and are better able to help them finish their schooling. They find employment more readily and earn higher wages or, if self-employed, are more productive. Because women more often than men are responsible for child rearing, they use their earnings for their children's health or education. Educated women are more active in civic affairs. Perhaps most important, an educated woman can more easily avoid the vicious cycle of poverty. Instead, she can be part of a virtuous cycle of education that ensures the well being of her descendants and her country.

Girls' education is a *development imperative*. Girls' education activities increase boys' enroll-

ment, retention, and achievement. The initiatives improve schools and teaching quality, increase educational resources, and benefit the community. Girls' education is good for boys and, paradoxically, sometimes even better for boys than for girls!

For More Information

Bangladesh: Academy for Educational Development
(202) 884-8000
E-mail: cogara@aed.org

Guatemala: Juárez and Associates, Inc.
(202) 331-7825
E-mail: juarezdc@iamdigex.net

Guinea:
USAID Center for Development Information and Evaluation
(202) 712-0579
E-mail: cdie_info@usaid.gov

Mali: Save the Children, U.S.A.
(203) 221-4125
E-mail: fwood@savethechildren.org